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1963/10/18

198. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State[1]

Saigon, October 18, 1963—4 p.m.

731. Eyes only for Secretary Rusk. Pls pass Secretary McNamara and DCI, Mr. John McCone, eyes only. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt.

1. Pursuant to instructions contained para 9 Deptel 534[2] and elaboration para 3 Deptel 570,[3] with MACV concurrence I appointed Major General Richard G. Stilwell, Assistant Chief of Staff J-3 MACV and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to convey substance of para 9 Deptel 534 to Deputy Secretary of Defense Nguyen Dinh Thuan.

[1] Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S Viet. Secret; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 6:44 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[2] Document 171.

[3] In this paragraph of telegram 570, October 12, the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA instructed the Embassy to proceed with the transfer of most paramilitary activities under the command of Colonel Tung. Those not approved for transfer were to be reviewed by CIA and MACV for possible transfer. All units should be paid except the special forces which remained in the Saigon vicinity outside the control of the Joint General Staff. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

2. General Stilwell and the [*less than 1 line not declassified*] met Thuan at Gia Long Palace by appointment on the morning of October 17. The meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes. Gen. Stilwell opened the conversation by stating that he had recently been traveling with Acting ARVN Chief of Staff, Major General Tran Van Don, to various subordinate headquarters throughout Vietnam and that the purpose of these travels had been to insure that all units were making full contribution to the war effort. Gen. Stilwell added that in this light, this meeting had been requested with Thuan.

3. Thuan immediately stated, "You've come to talk about the special forces." Gen. Stilwell and the [*less than 1 line not declassified*] acknowledged that this was true and then proceeded to explain the structure and support of special forces units in the Saigon area. It was pointed out that of ten special forces companies, seven are members or ARVN and are MAP-supported; three companies are civilian [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] then stated that he was instructed to indicate to Thuan that unless the civilian companies were effectively subordinated to the JGS and committed to field operations, all support of these companies would cease. Gen. Stilwell added that this applied to the MAP-supported units also but would be reflected in the long term, under the conditions specified, by a decrease equivalent to seven companies in the overall MAP support budget. It was carefully explained that the purpose of this action was to place these units in direct support of the war effort under his control.

4. Thuan seemed to absorb this fully and repeated his understanding that [*less than 1 line not declassified*] support of special forces would cease unless Vietnamese special forces are effectively subordinated to the JGS and committed to field operations.

5. Thuan was further informed that henceforth payments to mountain scouts and border surveillance personnel would be made only through US Special Forces mechanisms and funds for these programs would no longer be given directly to Col. Tung. Thuan was assured that the actual passage of funds would be through the hands of Vietnamese, not American, officers but that American Special Forces working with their Vietnamese counterparts in the provinces would directly oversee the expenditures of these funds. Thuan was interested in the amounts involved and seemed surprised at their magnitude.

6. Thuan was told that the USG does not plan any public announcement of this step but, if it became known and if the Embassy were queried, we would state that this action had been taken since we cannot support forces not directly contributing to the war effort. Thuan

was also informed that this matter would also be taken up directly with Col. Tung. He concurred in this and stated that he would discuss the matter immediately with the President.

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